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Twenty-third session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIRST PART (PUBLIC)* OF THE 391st MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 8 November 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. BURNS

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* The summary record of the second part (closed) of the meeting appears as document CAT/C/SR.391/Add.1.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

STATEMENT BY Mr. RAMCHARAN, DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

1. Mr. RAMCHARAN (Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights), greeting the members of the Committee against Torture on behalf of the High Commissioner, noted that just before the Committee's previous session, Bolivia, Belgium, Japan, Mozambique and Turkmenistan had become parties to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

2. As members perhaps recalled, in May 1999, the Chairpersons of treaty-bodies had met to consider the issue of the gender perspective in the implementation of treaties; a consensus had emerged that treaty bodies should address the impact of gender on the enjoyment of the rights guaranteed in their treaties.

3. The High Commissioner was asking for additional resources for the treaty bodies under the regular budget programme for 2000. Her request for two additional posts in the area of treaty implementation had moved successfully through the various General Assembly committees and was currently before the Fifth Committee. It was to be hoped that that final hurdle would be cleared and that it would then be possible to improve the situation of internal resources.

4. The High Commissioner attached great importance to the Committee's practice, doctrine and jurisprudence and was consulting within her Office on ways of setting up a core team to deal with matters that the Committee had to address, to ensure consistency among the treaty bodies and to work towards a joint jurisprudence.

5. There was an overriding need to take measures to prevent acts of torture. Speaking at the meeting of Chairpersons of treaty bodies, he had underscored the usefulness of checklists to show officials what exactly was expected of a State in terms of complying with the Convention. The human rights community should make prevention a flagship issue and he invited the Committee to reflect on ways of giving content to that concept, which the international community tended to approach in a rather general way.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (item 1 of the provisional agenda) (CAT/C/51)

6. The CHAIRMAN said that a proposal had been made for the Committee to add an item to the agenda in connection with the report prepared by the independent expert, Philip Alston, on enhancing the long-term effectiveness of the United Nations human rights treaty system (E/CN.4/1997/74). The proposed title of the new item was "Effective implementation of international instruments on human rights, including reporting obligations under international instruments on human rights". He said that if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to approve the proposal.

7. It was so decided.

8. Mr SØRENSEN suggested adding the following items for discussion: the "Istanbul protocol"; the draft optional protocol to the Convention against Torture; and the draft proposal for a plan of action to strengthen the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (HRI/MC/1999/Misc.3/Rev.1). He was also in favour of having a short discussion on the issue of prevention.

9. The provisional agenda (CAT/C/51), as amended, was adopted.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND OTHER MATTERS (agenda item 2)

10. THE CHAIRMAN said that he had been invited to attend the celebrations for the tenth anniversary of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, to be held in Strasbourg on 19 November 1999. He suggested Mr. Sørensen might replace him.

11. It was so agreed.

12. The CHAIRMAN further announced that the Committee's press conference was scheduled to be held at noon on Friday, 19 November 1999, in Conference Room V.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 19 OF THE CONVENTION (agenda item 4)

13. Mr. BRUNI (Secretary of the Committee), summarizing the current reporting situation, said that 107 initial reports had been due in the period June 1988-October 1999, of which 76 had already been submitted; 31, or less than one-third, were late, of which 22 were more than four years overdue. The States concerned, beginning with the those that were the most delayed, were Uganda, Togo, Guyana, Brazil, Guinea, Somalia, Estonia, Yemen, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cape Verde, Cambodia, Latvia, Seychelles, Antigua and Barbuda, Burundi, Slovakia, Slovenia, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Albania and Chad. Those States had already received between 4 and 17 reminders, depending on how late the reports were, some reports were more than 11 years overdue. Furthermore, Belize had still not submitted a new version of its very perfunctory report, which had been requested for 10 March 1994.

14. Of the 82 second periodic reports due in the period June 1992-October 1999, 46 had already been submitted; 34 were late, including 11 that were more than four years overdue. By order of lateness, they were: the reports of Afghanistan, Belize, Cameroon, Uganda, the Philippines, Togo, Guyana, Turkey, Brazil, Guinea and Somalia. Those States had been sent three or more reminders.

15. Of the 51 third periodic reports due in the period June 1996-October 1999, 23 had been submitted and 28 were overdue, some of them by more than three years, and the States concerned had already received three reminders.

16. In addition to the 7 reports to be examined at the current session, the Secretariat had already received reports from the following 12 countries: Armenia, Australia, Belarus, Canada, China, El Salvador, the Netherlands (Antilles and Aruba), Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and the United States of America. Those reports would be included in the programme of work of future Committee meetings.

The public part of the meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.